Language and Ideology in Albanian Newspaper Headlines

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze the dominant discourse in Albanian press reporting on the political crisis following the June 2009 elections, with a focus on headlines. The overall purpose is to show how headlines reflect the relationship between ideology, power relations and language in media. The analysis proceeds via Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Albanian newspapers' headlines. Critical discourse analysis focuses 'on social problems, and especially the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination' (van Dijk, 2001:96). Texts are not 'innocent'; as Fairclough (1995a:202) argues, we should ask 'how are the texts designed, why are they designed in this way, and how else could they have been designed. Following van Dijk and Fowler's (1991), this analysis is concerned with the relations of power and domination as represented in Albanian newspapers' reporting on the political crisis of 2009 – 2010, with an emphasis on the following questions: a) What meanings are conveyed by the words chosen? b) Are headlines subjected to linguistic manipulations? To answer these questions, and also to analyze how the ideological arena is reflected specifically in headlines, Albanian newspaper headlines are examined for distinct features in the vocabulary, nominalization, agency and voice (active and passive), noun phrase, categorization and wording, metaphors and topicalization. The study of headlines shows that the vast majority of headlines express ideology. They reveal direct or hidden ideological meanings. The study describes the relationship between the phrasing of the headlines and their audience. The analysis suggests that there is a two-way process at stake: that audience/target views in part dictate the language of the papers and in part shape the views of the readers on different issues.

INTRODUCTION

Corpus

In the paper, researcher will compare the presentation of the political conflict following the elections of June 2009, escalating with the hunger strike of the Socialist party in Albania, in the headlines of different Albanian daily newspaper.

The headlines constitute a corpus of headlines of 8 Albanian daily newspapers: “Zëri i popullit”, “Gazeta 55”, “Shekulli”, “Standard”, “Metropol”, “Shqip”, “RilindjaDemokratike”, “KohaJonë”, over a period of 40 days. The number of headlines analyzed is over 300.

For our analysis, we included only the main headlines on front pages that opened the newspapers during the period 15 April -25 May 2010.

AN OVERVIEW

This analysis is rooted in the political climate in Albania in April-May 2010. The Democratic Party narrowly won the controversial elections of June 2009 after a forced coalition with a left-wing opposition party, LSI (The Socialist Movement for Integration), in the June 28 general election. The Albanian political scene has been unstable since.

Following the elections, the Socialist Party demanded a partial recount of the general election; the recount was never granted, and the SP has largely boycotted the parliament for
the past eight months (September 2009-April 2010). In November 2009, the Socialist Party 
began a series of demonstrations in Tirana in protest of the result of the 2009 election. The 
demonstrations of the Socialist Party escalated in the period April-May 2010, and on May 1st 
2010 twenty-two SP lawmakers and 200 supporters of the Socialist Party started a hunger 
strike outside Prime Minister Sali Berisha’s office. The hunger strike started on May 1st 2010 
and ended after 19 days, after political leaders were invited to go to Strasbourg and hold talks 
with EU representatives about the political crisis in Albania.

Transitivity

Following Fowler (1991:71), transitivity has the capability to analyze the same event in 
different ways, a capability which can be deployed in journalistic analysis to serve multiple 
purposes. A transitivity analysis reveals the linguistic options available in discursive 
production. In any utterance, some linguistic possibilities are suppressed while others are 
manifested. These discursive choices indicate point of view and are ideologically significant.

The newspaper headlines are sufficient evidence of the particular role that transitivity plays in 
the ideological and political positioning of Albanian Daily newspapers. The first analysis will 
concentrate on extracts from eight different daily newspapers, all of which describe the same 
event, the hunger strike of the Socialist Party in Albania (the first day and the last day). The 
second analysis will concentrate on the use of transitivity in expressing processes related to 
the role of the two main leaders, of the Socialist and Democratic Party in the political crisis in 
Albania, in April-May 2010.

On May 1st 2010, the Socialist Party of Albania started a hunger strike in Tirana, demanding 
a partial recount of the votes of the June 2009 election. In all the headlines of the main 
Albanian daily newspapers, the hunger strike of the SP was the main topic, but based on the 
ideological/political position of the newspapers, focus was places on different elements.

1. Këlyshët e Bllokut kërkojnë pushtet. 

   The whelps Blloku* ask for power.

   The headline of the newspaper “Gazeta 55” starts with a subject “whelp” and with a verb in 
active form “to ask for.” Starting in this way, the report lodges the accusation that the hunger 
strike is nothing else but the reflection of the SP’s need for power.

   We see another underlying political motive in the use of a transitive verb in the headline of 
another newspaper, “Standard.” Here, it functions as another version of “reality”, blaming the 
Socialist Party for forcing its lawmakers to enter in a hunger strike (“The SP put in a hunger 
strike”, in an important moment for the visa liberalization process for Albania.

2. Ministrat e BE, Lobimpërshqiptarët: t’uhiqenvizatPS radikalizon qëndriminndajvizave, fut ne grevëurie 22 deputetë

   Ministers of EU, lobbing for Albanians: visa liberalization 

   SP radicalizes the position toward the visas, puts in an hunger strike 22 
   lawmakers.

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*Bloku is an area in the center of Tirana, where the former communist leaders used to live.
The language used suggests that the two daily newspapers “Standard” and “Gazeta 55” are not supporters of the Socialist Party, because the weight is put on the negativity of the actions taken by the Socialist Party.

Even though other Albanian daily newspapers show originality in the way they have chosen to treat the first day of the hunger strike of the SP, it is obvious that only few of them can be considered neutral. Reproduced below are the headlines of 5 Albanian newspapers reporting the start of the hunger strike of the Socialist Party, on May 1st 2010.

3. Opozita, protestëdhegrevëurie Sot mbledhpërkratësit e sajpërmitingun festivtë 1 majit

Shqip

The Opposition, protest and hunger strike
Today, the DP gathers its supporters in the festive demonstration of the 1st of May

4. NË BULEVARDPS, 22 deputetë me militantët në grevë urie

Panorama

IN BOULEVARD- SP, 22 lawmakers with militants in a hunger strike.

5. 12 ministratë BE-së: lobimpërvizat: 22 deputetëtë PS-sënë grevë urie

KohaJonë

12 Ministers of EU: lobbying for visas: 22 lawmakers of the SP in a hunger strike

22 deputetë të Partisë Socialistë në grevë urie, protestuesit përplasen me qeverinë

Korrieri

22 Lawmakers of the Socialist Party in a hunger strike, protesters are clashing with the government

6. PS në grevë urie, sot përplasja e mitingjeve

Gazetashqiptare

SP in a hunger strike, today the clashes of the two demonstrations

7. Socialistët në grevë urie: Hap kutitë!

Shekulli

The socialists in strike: Open the (ballot) boxes!

Three of the above analyzed newspapers (Korrieri, Panorama, KohaJonë) share almost the same headline structure (22 deputetëtë PS-sënë grevë urie-22 SP lawmakers in a hunger strike), focusing mostly on the number of the lawmakers of the SP participating in the hunger strike, and only the use of the transitive verbs or nominalization in the first or the second half of the headlines demonstrates the respective political orientation of each newspaper.

In the headline of “KohaJonë” the number of SP lawmakers participating in the hunger strike is given only to be compared to the number of 12 EU ministers lobbying for the visa liberalization process in Albania. This comparison places the decision to enter in a hunger
strike in a negative light, as it presents the hunger strike as an obstacle to EU integration and rule of law in a historical moment for Albania when the EU ministers themselves are lobbying for visa liberalization for Albania.

The same structure is used in the newspaper “Korrieri”, followed by the fact that “the protesters are clashing with the government.” This additional information clearly indicates the fact that this newspaper is biased towards the SP by emphasizing, in the headline, that the hunger strike of 22 lawmakers has its supporters, who are clashing with the government.

The newspaper “Panorama” seems to see the hunger strike from a more neutral “angle”, by focusing mostly on where the hunger strike is taking place and the number of the lawmakers participating in it (In Boulevard). The first impression we have when reading the headline of the newspaper “Shqip” is that the information given seems to be balanced, by providing information about both the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party. Even though this newspaper has chosen to give information about both parties, the use of the transitive verb “mbledh-it gathers” used in the second part of the headline, suggests the deteriorating situation of the Democratic Party, which is forced to react to the protest and to the hunger strike of the SP by gathering its supporters in a festive demonstration for the 1st of May.

The end of the hunger strike on May 19th 2010 was also reported as the main topic from all the Albanian daily newspapers. The end of the hunger strike was not a result of any agreements between the SP and the DP in Albania to recount the votes. Rather, it came after an invitation for the two main leaders to meet in Strasbourg with EU leaders. The fact that the hunger strike brought no concrete results for the SP made – perhaps even forced -- some of the daily newspapers to open the newspapers with headlines with passive or reflexive verbs.

8. Mbylletgreva, zgjidhjanë Strasburg

2010

The strike has ended, solution in Strasbourg

9. ZbardhennegociatatPS mbyll grevën pa kutitë, Rama e Berishanë Strasburg

Panorama, 20 May 2010

The negotiations are being made public

SP closes the strike without the voting ballots, Rama and Berisha in Strasbourg

10. Takimi Rama-Berisha, PS mbyll grevën

Shekulli, 20 May 2010

Meeting Rama-Berisha, SP ends the strike

11. Dështongreva e urisë e PS-së

KohaJonë, 20 may 2010

Failure for the SP’s hungerstrike

12. PS braktis grevën, detajet për vendimin

Metropol, 20 May 2010

SP abandons the strike, details for the decision
13. BetejamesjetësdhevdekjesUlbërishënlé
keqardhjepërkipundësrtharinpolitik, negotiatiatnëshans i ri

Zëri i popullit, 20 May 2010

Battles between life and death, sits Berisha in Strasbourg
Rama: Resentment for the political rival, negotiations a new chance

14. Berisha-Rama, negotiatiat për darkën e Strasburgut

Gazetashqiptare, 20 may 2010

Berisha-Rama, negotiations for the dinner in Strasbourg

The newspapers “Shqip”, “Panorama” and “Shekulli” which are considered to be independent newspapers in Albania have chosen to open the headline with the verb “mbyll” (to close/to end). Even though the headlines structures are almost the same, there is a big difference between these three headlines, based on the transitivity of the verbs. By using the passive form of the verb “mbyll”, the newspaper “Shqip” gives no information to the readers about the reasons why the hunger strike ended, and whether or not there was any compromise. Nothing can be deduced by the information given in this headline other than the facts that the hunger strikes ended and the solution lies in Strasbourg. This leaves the reader with the question: Why in Strasbourg?

The newspaper “Panorama” opened the newspaper with a reflexive verb, giving the information that the negotiations are made public. The use of the verb mbyllin the active form and the use of the SP as the subject of the sentence give the reader the information that it was the SP that ended the strike. The second part of the headline gives the needed information about the fact that the voting boxes will not be opened, and that the two main leaders will meet in Strasbourg.

The newspaper “Shekulli” has used almost the same structure for the main headline as “Panorama”, but here, by starting the headline with the information about the meeting Rama-Berisha, the fact that the SP has ended the strike becomes of secondary importance.

The newspaper “Metropol” uses an active verb with a negative connotation to define the end of the strike, “toabandon”, putting the responsibility for the hunger strike and the end of it on the SP. And the newspaper of SP uses an active verb to inform that the hunger strike forced Berisha to start negotiations in Strasbourg.

In this way, verb transitivity plays an important role also in distinguishing between the newspapers, supporters of the SP or DP, and the newspapers that stayed neutral in reporting the hunger strike of SP.

Transitivity analysis is a sensitive indicator of ideology and point of view. Halliday (1985:101), as referred in Simpson (2003:82) explains that the way in which transitivity carries out the ideational function of language is by expressing processes. Transitivity analyzes what happens, who are the participants, and what are the circumstances. Halliday explains what this means:

“What does it mean to say that a clause represents a process? Our most powerful conception of reality is that it consists of “goings-on”: of doing, happening, feeling, being. These goings-on are sorted out in the semantic system of the language and expressed through the grammar of the clause”.

The semantic processes expressed by clauses have three components:
- process itself, which is expressed by the verb phrase in a clause.
- The participants involved in the process. These roles are typically realized by noun phrases in the clause.
- The circumstances associated with the process, normally expressed by adverbial and prepositional phrases.

By analyzing the Albanian daily newspapers of the right-wing and left-wing parties in April-May 2010, it is quite clear that the headlines where the participants are used as the subject of the sentence are mostly praising the respective leaders of the SP’s, Edi Rama, and DP’s, Sali Berisha, for their work, or blaming them for the political crisis in Albania.

15. Ramakazënërrugën e integrimittëShqipërisë

Gazeta 55, 13 May 2010
Rama has blocked the road toward the integration of Albania

16. Rama’s’mbylldot grevën, se humbetpartinë

Gazeta 55, 19 May 2010
Rama cannot close the hunger strike, because he will lose his party

17. Berishaurdërondhunëndajdeputetëvetëopozitës. Nuk ndalet revolta nga veriu në Jug

Zëri i popullit, 13 May 2010
Berisha orders violence against the lawmakers of the opposition. The revolt from North to South doesn’t stop

18. Berisha “Shok” nëBruksel”Pengon firmën për finalen në parlamentin europian

Berisha- Shock in Brussels, undermines the final agreement in the European Parliament

In the four excerpts taken respectively from the newspaper “Gazeta 55”, supporter of the DP Party and from the newspaper “Zëri i popullit”, the official newspaper of the Socialist Party, the use of the active verbs “to block, to close, to undermine, to order” incriminate” the participants, used as the subject of the headlines, in the process Both leaders are directly accused for their negative role in the political situation in Albania.

“The incrimination” of the leaders seems to be strong even in passive structures, where the objects of the sentences are placed first, and the agent responsible is shifted to the end of the sentence, as in the headline of the newspaper “Gazeta 55”

19. Grevistët janë marrë peng nga Edi Rama

Gazeta 55, 9 May 2010
The hunger strikers are taken hostage by Edi Rama

By analyzing the headlines of the Socialist Party’s newspaper “Zëri i popullit” and of the newspaper “Gazeta 55” over a one month period 15 April-19 May 2009, it becomes obvious that as Van Dijk (1980) states “the ideologically monitored opinions about the responsibility for socially positive or negative acts may be differentially expressed in different syntactic forms.”
The negative properties attributed respectively to the Prime Minister Berisha and to Edi Rama, as the main factors for the political crisis in Albania, are not necessarily enhanced by using their names as the subject of the headlines. The newspaper “Zëri i Popullit” has used the surname of the Prime Minister Sali Berisha in 23 out of 27 consecutive headlines, in different positions: as the subject, direct and indirect object. Almost the same situation occurs with the newspaper “Gazeta 55”.

It appears that the names of Berisha and Rama are only mentioned in a direct form to approach and convince the SP and DP followers, respectively, of the responsibility Berisha and Rama held for the political situation in Albania, especially after the general election of June 2009.

20. Berisha “kap” drejtësinë
   Zëri i popullit, 20 April 2010
   Berisha “seizes” the justice

21. Edi Rama nuk po gjen karar
   Gazeta 55, 10 May 2010
   Edi Rama cannot rest

22. BrukselishuplakëBerishës: Kryeministër i križëspolitike, korrupsionitdhekrimittëorganizuar
   Zëri i popullit, 15 April 2010
   Brussels: a slap to Berisha: Prime Minister of the political crisis, corruption and organized crime

23. PresionndërkombëtarëmbiBerishën: DëgjoopozitënInternational pressure on Berisha: Listen to the opposition

The Syntactic And Lexical Structure Of The Headlines

The politicians and the journalists of SP who planned and managed the political situation in Albania before and during the hunger strike knew the importance of controlling the flow of “information”. They prepared their audience for an escalation of the protests in April 2010, by using a special form of the headlines of the official newspaper of the SP, “Zëri i Popullit”.

For the period analyzed, all the main headlines of the newspaper were organized in the same way: the newspaper will open with only one word or a brief structure, in capital letters, followed by a sentence. The use of capital letters plays another important role, by emphasizing the importance of the situation. Van Dijk (1981:55) considers this process as topicalization “Words may be put up from through so called “topicalization”.

The words chosen for this structure were mostly adjectives and nouns. The adjectives used had two main functions, either to attack the Prime Minister of Albania and the DP and indicate the difficult situation he was in, or to show the strength of the SP supporters. In this way, the audience of the SP would perceive the situation as being in the favor of their battle for a recount of the votes.

24. I RRETHUAR (Surrounded)
We have to mention that here we see also over-lexicalization, which is the existence of an excess of quasi-synonymous terms for entities and ideas that are a particular preoccupation or problem in the political discourse.

We will discuss the use of nouns in the Albanian headlines, following Fowler’s statement that nominalization is inherently, mystificatory; that it permits habits of concealment, particularly in the areas of power-relations and writers’ attitude. This is specifically the case in all the headlines where nouns are used to open the newspaper.

Another potential use of nominalization is reification. Fowler (1993:80) states that processes and qualities assume the status of things: impersonal, inanimate, capable of being amassed and counted like capital, paraded like possessions.

Additionally, the use of nouns with a negative connotation as the opening words of the SP’s newspaper is intended to play an important role in making the audience believe that the situation of the other political party is really difficult, and on the verge of collapsing. Following are some of the nouns used in “Zëri i Popullit”.

Conversely, the use of now groups (noun + adjectives) seems to have the opposite effect representing the hunger strike for the SP
As this transitivity analysis indicated, linguistic choices are an integral part of the reproduction of ideology in the newspapers. In particular, linguistic practices are the basis of discriminatory practice when representing such so-called “groups” of people as women, young people, “ethnic minorities”, and so forth. The words and phrases that are chosen to be used in a newspaper’s headlines in most cases betray the views, values and ideology of the newspaper. Political ideologies are variously expressed in the differential, if not polarized, lexicalization of political actors.

The lexical choices of the Albanian headlines confirm the notions of SELF and OTHER of van Dijk (1998:b), with positive terms used to describe ourselves and negative terms to describe opponents. The proliferation of often pejorative words for designating political rivals has often been mentioned in the above examples, but we would like to add few more:

35. **BurracakuBerishaikën** (The coward Berisha leaves)
Zëri i popullit, 14.05.2010

36. **Monarko-fashistët** Rama e Ruçidjeginflamurin e NATO-s
The fashists Rama and Ruçi burn the NATO flag
Gazeta 55, 02.05.2010

Metaphors

Following Van Dijk (1981), rhetorical strategies can help to draw and hold the attention of addressees. The strategies enhance an audience’s effective comprehension of a political actor’s views and may even help to change an audience’s opinion. In effect, they help express and defend opinions persuasively. Van Dijk states that political campaigning may metaphorically be linked to aggressive acts such as invasions, imprisonments, bad policies, bans on free speech etc.

According to van Dijk (1981) metaphors are rhetorical devices that can be drawn upon in the communication and consolidation of group ideologies.

In the headlines of Albanian newspapers, the metaphors are used to reinforce the criticism toward the political opponents.

Two different newspaper choose the same metaphor “to slap”, in different directions, the leader of the SP and the Prime Minister, and to show the strong reaction of the EU against, respectively, the boycott and the Prime Minister’s governance.

The use of this metaphor is a reflection of the tense and aggressive political situation in Albania, and of what both political parties would like: a solution that should come from a very strong reaction of the international institutions, and not from the political forces in Albania.

37. **Shuplaka e Strasburgut**: U lodhëm, Rama tënëdërpresëbojkotin
Gazeta 55, 27.04.2010

38. **NA TURPËROI**
BruselishuplakëBerishës: Kryeministër i krizëspolitike, korrupsonit dhe krimittëorganizuar
(Brussels: a slap toBerisha: Primeminister of the political crisis, corruption and the organized crime)
The newspapers “Zëri i popullit” and “Gazeta 55” help to create in readers’ minds the image of the state or the people captured by respectively the two political leaders, as the main political factors, by using almost the same metaphors.

39. Shtet i kapur (A seized state)

Zëri i popullit, 15 April 2010

Berisha “kap” drejtësinë
(Berisha “seizes” the justice)

Zëri i popullit, 23 April 2010

40. Grevistët janë marrë peng nga Edi Rama
The hunger strikers are taken hostage by Edi Rama

Zëri i popullit, 20 April 2010

Gazeta 55, 09 May 2010

Through these metaphors, the Albanian newspapers appeal to both the reason and the emotions of their readers who are at the same time the supporters of the two main political parties in Albania. In the first excerpt the audience can understand the metaphor without any problem, because they are supporters of the SP that is in opposition, so that in their opinion the state “is taken/seized” by the government.
REFERENCES


